

Self-reflection and peer learning are key to improving HIV prevention capacity and prioritisation in the West and Central African Region



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BACKGROUND

The South-to-South HIV Prevention Learning Network (SSLN) was established in response to the request from the Global National AIDS Council Directors' Forum for a learning platform on HIV prevention. The learning network which started as a proof of concept in 2020 covering two HIV prevention pillars in 10 countries scaled to all five HIV prevention pillars 2022 in 15 sub-Saharan African countries. **It is the goal of the learning network to strengthen member countries' HIV prevention programming through shared learning of best practices and networking.**

Each country through the National AIDS Council nominates **country champions** who are representatives of the National Agency for the Control of HIV/AIDS, policy makers, implementers, development partners, community-based organisations and community networks. Country champions assess their prevention programmes using a HIV Prevention Self-Assessment Tool (PSAT). The analysis of this tool informs a customised learning agenda for the country highlighting specific learning activity to address identified gaps. The country champions participate in the tailored learning activities and are encouraged to cascade learnings at national and subnational levels.

This study explores the effectiveness of these learning activities as well as country-specific experiences, successes, and key lessons learned from West and Central African (WCA) country champions in Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Nigeria and the Republic of Congo during the programme's mid-term evaluation.



AIMS & OBJECTIVES

The overall purpose of the mid-term evaluation was to measure SSLN's success in reaching its aim, measured by outputs and outcomes as described in the SSLN theory of change.

Other objectives of the evaluation:

- Assess the effectiveness of the SSLN approaches to achieve its aims and objectives
- Document successful SSLN activities and approaches that strengthen HIV prevention capacity
- Explore expectations and future directions of the network

METHODS

The evaluation team employed a mixed method approach, which included document reviews, an online survey, sampling activity attendance, and key informant interviews. While all champions received the online survey, key informant interviews were specifically conducted in selected countries like Ghana and Nigeria. In the West and Central African region, 86 champions participated in the survey, while 18 champions took part in the Key Informant Interviews.

Survey data was cleaned and analysed in Stata, with results then presented in frequencies and percentages. Key Informant Interview (KII) data, on the other hand, was transcribed and analysed using NVivo software to identify common themes, trends, and challenges. Further analysis involved integrating sub-themes into broader themes through reflective discussions and field notes.



Document Review

Targeted review of programme documents to assess evaluation-relevant findings



Online Survey

Deployed to all champions to explore the effectiveness of the SSLN



Activity Attendance

Observed a sample of learning activities in person, virtual live and virtual recordings



Key Informant Interviews

Designed to engage in a deeper qualitative inquiry that complemented the other data sources

Côte d'Ivoire	28	-	6 Months	Nigeria	19	11
Ghana	20	7		Republic of Congo	19	-

RESULTS

Strong Collaborative Culture

Country champions shared that the SSLN has approach has created a strong learning network that is collaborative, open and country-led.

- SSLN has become a space where countries feel comfortable discussing challenges and sharing experiences
- The SSLN has brought together and strengthened the collaboration with different HIV prevention stakeholders in-country

If your fellow sub-Saharan African country can do it, then you can also do [the] same or even better in your country.

Ghana country champion, survey respondent

I think their working with the Government is the most influential ... working with the Government and the UN agencies have actually helped to [move things forward].

Nigeria country champion, KII

I contacted the Nigeria team on the issue of activities aimed at adolescent MSM. We are in the process of exploiting the proposed documentation...

Côte d'Ivoire country champion, survey respondent

Learning Culture

Cross-Sector Approach

Knowledge Gained Through SSLN

Champions agreed that participating in SSLN learning activities has improved their technical knowledge and provided them with practical tools and resources to improve HIV prevention programming.

Improved Technical Knowledge

Knowledge to Job Responsibilities

I got better and polished when I joined the SSLN, in terms of the research knowledge... so getting to work with SSLN has exposed me to information I really did not know... I have broader knowledge on HIV/AIDS research, HIV/AIDS information-sharing sites and that has helped me...

Nigeria country champion, KII

So, personally, the exposure has further enhanced my awareness, knowledge, competences when it comes to HIV programming to make sure that anywhere I find myself when it comes to HIV programming and services, I will be able to bring in a lot of ideas and knowledge to further support or enhance whatever is going on.

Ghana country champion, KII

HIV Prevention Advocacy

Champions reported that SSLN is helping advocate for more resources for HIV prevention programs and opening the conversation with higher level leaders and donors.

SSLN helps give country champions a voice that decision makers listen to.

Ghana country champion, KII

As [staff on] a USAID-funded KP program, we've now started looking at... prevention. The[re] are low hanging fruits that before now, nobody bothered about... then with SSLN emphasizing... prevention... everybody is now thinking about [it].

Nigeria country champion, KII

CONCLUSION

The SSLN demonstrates that a truly country-led network is feasible. These findings amplifies the significance of networking, social capital, and leveraging competencies to improve HIV prevention programmes in the West and Central African Region. Country champions expressed their desire to continue the current activities, with a stronger emphasis on country-to-country engagements and peer learning exchanges. Feedback from the champions, will be considered for an improved programme implementation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Continue country-led facilitative approach
- Develop a more systematic MEL approach to measure SSLN contribution
- Balance virtual engagements and in-person engagements
- Expand engagement of community organisations and civil societies



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